

Dear Reader:

Enclosed for your review and comment is the Sioux Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Environmental Impact Statement. A copy can also be found on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/>.

The purpose of this DEIS is to disclose the environmental effects of alternative leasing scenarios the Forest Supervisor is considering for managing the oil and gas resources on portions of the Sioux Ranger District. This analysis and Final EIS will also implement the authorities and responsibilities granted to the Forest Service by the Leasing Reform Act and meet the federal regulatory requirements of 36 CFR 228, Subpart E.

The DEIS describes:

- The environmental issues and concerns related to the proposed leasing action;
- The potentially affected environment;
- Reasonable alternative leasing scenarios;
- Mitigating lease stipulations to be applied for each alternative; and
- The direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental consequences of these alternatives.

The DEIS describes and explains the leasing decisions the Forest Supervisor will make. It explains how the Forest Supervisor and the State Director of the BLM would implement any decision, if made, to authorize and sell leases and how future decisions may be made to issue permits to drill and develop fields of oil and gas.

Three alternatives were considered in detail: (1) No Action - No New Leases; (2) Lease with Forest Plan Stipulations; and (3) Lease with Additional Stipulations to Protect Forest Resources. We have chosen Alternative 3 as our preferred alternative.

The Sioux Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Environmental Impact Statement is available for public comment and review. A copy can also be found on the Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/custer/>. Your **written comments must be postmarked 60 days from the date of publication of the notice of availability in the Federal Register. The notice of availability is expected to be published in the Federal Register May 9, 2003.** Please submit and address your written comments to the Environmental Consultant: Tetra Tech FW, Attention: Wendy Hill, 3947 Lennane Drive, Suite 200, Sacramento, CA 95834-1973 by **July 8, 2003**.

Comments, names and addresses of respondents will be open for public review at the Forest Supervisor's Office in Billings, Montana. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. To withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently when beginning your written comment. Requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

Sincerely,



GARY L. "STAN" BENES
Acting Forest Supervisor

4/21/03

Date



MARTIN C. OTT
State Director
Bureau of Land Management
Montana State Office

Date

04/21/03